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Meeting People's Aspirations to Live a Better Life with a Mature and Established System in China

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ABSTRACT

As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved to take the form of a contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing need for a better life. In order to meet this need through institutional construction, it is necessary (1) to promote high-quality development, building a modernized economy so as to meet the increased material and cultural needs of the people; (2) to achieve a sense of gain, happiness and security among the people through scientific institutional construction; (3) to satisfy people's new needs for democracy, the rule of law, fairness, justice, security, and environmental protection through efficient institutional construction; (4) to establish and steadily improve a national system of basic public services to ensure universal access to childcare, education, employment, medical services, care of elderly people, housing, and social welfare assistance, and to continue to advance towards common prosperity for all of Chinese society; (5) to provide better education, more stable jobs, higher incomes, more reliable social security, more advanced heath care, more comfortable living conditions, and a more beautiful environment, and to allow the younger generation to grow, work and live in better conditions through comprehensive, fully-fledged institutions and an enhanced governance system.

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As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved from one that pits backward social production against the ever-increasing material and cultural needs of the people into a contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing need for a better life. This better life may be summed up using a series of numbers: two, three, six, seven and nine. Two refers to two higher needs, material and cultural; three refers to the three feelings of prosperity, happiness and security; six refers to the six ever-growing new needs for democracy, the rule of law, fairness, justice, security, and environmental protection; seven refers to universal access to seven public services, specifically, childcare, education, employment, medical services, care of elderly people, housing, and social welfare assistance; and nine refers to improvements in nine areas

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of social life, including better education, steadier jobs, higher incomes, more reliable social security, more advanced health care, more comfortable living conditions, a more beautiful environment, and better conditions in which the younger generation can grow, live and work. In order to solve this new contradiction of the current era, China must continuously improve the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and modernize its governance capacity and system of rule. To this end, the fourth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in October 2019 passed the "Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Some Major Issues concerning How to Uphold and Improve the System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Advance the Modernization of China's System and Capacity for Governance" (referred to hereafter as "the decision"), which calls for the urgent establishment of the system needed to meet people's new expectations for a better life, and which stresses the importance of institutional construction in various areas so as to achieve this goal. Specifically, it involves the following five aspects.

1. A Modernized Economic System for High Quality Development

In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, people's material and cultural needs have experienced qualitative changes, with demand now for material and cultural products that are of higher quality and greater diversity, and that are upgraded more frequently. This is shown by changes in the composition of demand; 40 years ago demand was focused on sewing machines, 30 years ago on television sets, 20 years ago on cars, and 10 years ago on cell phones. Increasingly in the most recent years, demand has been focused on the satisfaction of people's psychological needs. This means that the problem facing China has shifted from one of "to have or not to have" to one of quality improvement (see Xin 2020).

Fulfilling these new demands requires first and foremost the development of high quality to meet the greater needs of the people in both material and cultural terms.

Materially, it requires that China, following the spirit of "the decision," should adhere to its fundamental economic system and speed up the modernization of its economy. Specifically, it should give full play to the dominant position of the state-owned economy, so that this sector can occupy a strong position in the development of the strategic industries that underpin the national economy and people's livelihood, and that drive the development of the national economy as a whole. China should also promote the healthy development of the non-public economy, so that non-public enterprises can enjoy more opportunities for technological innovation, management innovation and marketing innovation, and can create more diversified and high-quality wealth for society. It should improve the mechanisms through which such factors of production as labor, capital, land, knowledge, technology, management and data are assessed by the market and remunerated according to their contributions, so as to stimulate the potential of the various factors of production and take full advantage of each. China should also press ahead with constructing the market system for various factors, in order to realize market-determined prices, an autonomous and orderly flow, and efficient and fair allocation in the areas concerned. It should improve the functioning of the government, clarifying the relationship between the government and the market and between the government and society, and making the market subject more active; it should aim at economic

development that is innovative, coordinative, open, green, and shared among the population. In general, China must stay with the main line of supply-side structural reform, and its main goal should always be reducing ineffective or inefficient supply and increasing supply efficiency.

In the field of culture, quality development and the satisfaction of people's greater cultural needs must be based on the improvement of institutions that help ensure people's cultural rights as important elements in their rights overall. The more advanced a society is, the greater the demands it makes in this respect. China must establish and steadily improve a guiding and stimulating mechanism for the creation and dissemination of cultural goods, so as to generate more good-quality cultural products that people love. In the meantime, China needs to improve the functioning of modern culture-related industries and their related markets, and to devise economic policies that favor high-quality cultural development, so that more and more enterprises and individuals can take initiatives in creating cultural products that are popular among the people.

2. People's Sense of Gain, Happiness and Security, and the Institutional Guarantees

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, President Xi Jinping has raised the important idea of increasing people's sense of gain, happiness and security, and has explained this idea from various perspectives on different occasions.

First, and from the perspective of ensuring safety in production and life and maintaining social stability, he has stressed that "efforts should be made to ensure safe production and food and drug safety, to prevent major natural disasters . . . and to constantly enhance people's sense of gain, happiness and security" (Xi 2019a). In this respect, the most important criterion is the smiles on people's faces. Second, and from the perspective of avoiding pointless formalities and bureaucracy so as to bring tangible benefits to the masses, he has stressed the importance of "resolving prominent issues that are of great concern to the people" (Xi 2019b). Clearly, the degree of bureaucracy and of pointless formalities is negatively correlated with people's sense of gain, happiness and security. Third, and from the perspective of solidarity with minority nationalities, Xi Jinping has pointed out that "we should remain true to our original aspiration . . . and make the scenic route of the northern border of our motherland more beautiful" (Xi 2019c). The sense of gain, happiness and security must not be exclusive to any one particular ethnic group, but should be shared by all ethnic groups in China. Fourth, and from the perspective of deepening China's reform, Xi Jinping has noted that "China has taken as its departure point the needs of economic and social development . . . and has solved many troublesome problems concerning people's livelihoods" (Xi 2019d). The key criterion for determining whether the reform is being advanced in a comprehensive manner and whether major obstacles are being overcome should be whether the people have a genuine sense of gain, happiness and security. Fifth, and from the perspective of urban planning and management, he has stressed that

> in both the planning and construction of cities, in both the building of new city areas and the renovation of old neighborhoods, there should always be a people-centered policy . . . so as to create a stronger sense of progress and a happier and better life for the people. (Xi 2019e)

The planning, construction, management and operation of cities should take into account people's growing sense of gain, happiness and security, thus turning cities into places where people's lives get truly better. Sixth, and from the perspective of party members' education, he has pointed out that in the educational project "Remain True to Our Original Aspiration and Keep Our Mission Firmly in Mind," all party members and cadres should

> effectively address the most immediate and authentic interests that are of the greatest concern to the people, in particular the difficulties in receiving medical treatment, attending school, obtaining employment and housing, and other troublesome and painful issues. The aim should be to meet people's expectations with visible changes, and to significantly enhance people's sense of gain, happiness and security. (Xi 2020)

People's sense of gain, happiness and security demonstrates the breadth and depth of their "better life," and is an important criterion for evaluating the results of work by the party and government. The word "sense" implies a subjective feeling, like having a meal that is sufficient in quantity, tastes good, and is pleasing for the mind. This has a number of implications. (1) People's needs have entered a new stage, in which it is not only external, objective needs that are considered, but in which internal, subjective evaluations and psychological perceptions must also be addressed. Aside from the objective fact that something is acquired, there is the question of whether it is acquired in agreeable fashion. This means that between the subjective and objective aspects of needs, there is now an increasing degree of unity. (2) The ways in which people's needs must be satisfied have become more and more diverse, because psychological satisfaction is now more important, and this requires more complex techniques and artistic measures. (3) The "three senses" are closely connected: the sense of gain leads to that of happiness, which in turn results in hope for the future and consequently a sense of security in life. It may be said that a sense of gain is a prerequisite, a sense of happiness is the core, and a sense of security is the base. The realization of these "three senses" ultimately relies on institutional construction. The sense of gain, happiness and security requires institutional construction to keep increasing the degree of people's satisfaction with the country, so that China will become a world leader in terms of people's satisfaction, a country where people can always feel hope for the future. Through comprehensive management, people's living standards will be continuously improved, and their sense of happiness enhanced. Through increased effort in such projects as a safe China and a healthy China, and through improvements to institutions in various spheres, the environment for people to live and work in peace and contentment will be ensured, important issues such as the COVID-19 epidemic that can cause great physical and psychological damage will be solved through the use of concrete measures, and people's sense of security will keep growing.

3. People's New Needs for Democracy, the Rule of Law, Fairness, Justice, and Environmental Protection, and the Necessary Institutional Guarantees

With the historic shift in the major social contradiction, not only do people have greater needs in the areas of material and cultural life, but they also have ever-growing needs with regard to democracy, the rule of law, fairness, justice, and environmental protection.

On the one hand, the growth of the demand for democracy comes from the continuous improvement of the democratic socialist political system and from the consolidation of the position of the people as the masters of the country, while on the other, it is the result of increased self-confidence. The democratic needs of the people are manifested in their increasing concern with state affairs, and with how these affairs are administered. In this regard, "the decision" stipulates that China must improve its democratic system, enrich the forms of democracy, broaden the channels of democracy, and implement democratic elections, democratic consultation, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision in accordance with the law. Systems and governance in all areas need to better reflect the will of the people, protect their rights and interests, and stimulate their creativity. Through institution-building, China will construct a whole-process democracy, including elections, decision-making, management and supervision, so that the people will have channels, organizations and mechanisms to participate in democracy. Institutional construction will also allow substantive democracy to be developed, so that each democratic activity becomes a process to realize people's interests. Efforts will be made to promote institutionalization, standardization and direct democracy at the grass-roots level. Self-management, self-service, self-education and self-supervision will be practiced widely in urban and rural community governance, in grass-roots public affairs and in public welfare undertakings. These four "selves" have real substance. China will improve the democratic management system of enterprises and public institutions through staff and workers' congresses; it will explore effective ways for enterprise staff and workers to participate in management, will ensure the right of the masses of staff and workers to know, participate, express and supervise, and will safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of workers and staff members.

The increased demand for the rule of law is due, on the one hand, to the continuous enhancement of the people's awareness of the rule of law as a result of educational and promotional activity in this area, and on the other hand, to the increasing complexity of the economic and social structure. The growing role of the legal system in the collective life of the people is an inevitable trend that any modern country must face. The increased expectation that the rule of law will be observed is reflected in the fact that the people's demand for legal services has expanded dramatically. More and more people are seeking legal consultations, and resort to litigation when necessary. In the first half of 2019, nearly 15 million new cases were filed in courts nationwide.[1] With a slight decline in 2020, this number has been growing by a large margin every year since 2004.[2] In this regard, "the decision" upholds the rule of law for the people with reliance on the people; it strengthens the protection of human rights under the rule of law, and insists that citizens must enjoy a wide range of rights and freedoms in accordance with the law while carrying out their due obligations. To achieve this goal, China must unswervingly follow the path of the rule of law with Chinese characteristics, comprehensively strengthen the rule of law, and adhere to the joint advancement of the rule of law, the exercise of power in accordance with the law, and the conducting of administration in accordance with the law. In sum, China must continue to build the country, government and society as a whole under the rule of law. Fundamentally, building a country with the rule of law requires meeting the increasing demand of the people for laws to be enacted in a fair and consistent way.

The increasing demand for fairness is due, on the one hand, to the deepening of reform and opening-up, which has made people's awareness of the issue of fairness

more and more acute, and on the other hand, to the fact that many institutional problems have not yet been well resolved, meaning that there is still a lot of social inequality. As early as January 22, 2013, in a speech at the second plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, Xi Jinping pointed out:

> If one has to rely on social connections and under-the-table deals to get university admission, pass a civil service selection examination, run an enterprise, bid for a project, get promoted, buy a house, find a job, stage a performance, go abroad, and so on, to the point where those with powerful connections receive more care, and those without such connections never have opportunities no matter how capable they are, this will seriously affect social fairness and justice. If this situation is not corrected, how can we create a lively situation in which talented people emerge in large numbers and make the best of their abilities? How can this society still have the energy for development? And how can our party and country still keep developing vigorously? (Party Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee 2014, 137–138)

Indeed, in many fields such as providing education, selecting civil servants, running enterprises, undertaking projects, hiring workers, securing promotions, buying accommodation, mounting a stage performance, going abroad, etc., there was a time when privileges did exist. After the CPC's 18th National Congress, these problems were solved to a certain extent, even if they did not completely disappear, as the anti-corruption campaign achieved a landslide victory. Responding to the people's growing need for fairness, "the decision" stipulates that the reform should meet the people's diverse and multi-level needs, and that the fruits of the reform and development should benefit all people in an increasingly equitable way. "The decision" features a design, constructed at various levels and from various angles, intended to create a market environment in which different ownership entities have equal access to factor resources in accordance with the law, participate in fair and open competition, and enjoy equal legal protection. The aim is to create a fair market environment, to strengthen the basic positions of competition policy, to implement an investigation system to ensure fair competition, and to strengthen and improve the enforcement of laws against monopoly and unfair business practices, so that market entities of all kinds are able to compete on an equitable basis. In this way, the system of property rights protection based on the fairness principle will be improved, a system of punitive damages for infringement of intellectual property rights will be established, and the protection provided to the business secrets of enterprises will be strengthened, so as to ensure fair guarantees of all property rights and to stimulate people's readiness to innovate. This will enable steady progress in the construction of a factor market system in which factor prices are determined by the market, autonomous and orderly flow is achieved, and allocation is efficient and fair.

On the one hand, the growing demand for justice reflects the economic and social development that has raised people's level of civilization, and consequently, the continuous development of the concept of justice. On the other hand, the further opening-up of China to the outside world has broadened people's vision, and equipped them with more opportunities for comparison. The demand for justice is reflected not only in the process of production, but also in social life. The test of whether a problem has been handled well is not only whether it appears to have been solved, but also whether the solution meets the requirements of justice. In response to this demand for equitable outcomes, "the

decision" suggests that China must improve its legal system to ensure social fairness and justice, so that the people can see fairness and justice in every judicial case, and that it must improve its public service system, promoting equal accessibility to basic public services so as to fully reflect the principle of justice.

The increased demand for security is due in part to the growing complexity of the economic and social structure, and as a result, the increasingly complex relations among the people, ranging from economic relations to those in work and everyday life. Meanwhile, economic globalization has resulted in various foreign factors directly and indirectly affecting people's lives and productive activity, and the factors affecting security are multiplying day by day. To effectively meet the security needs of the people, "the decision" stipulates that the national security system must be improved and national security capacity enhanced, with people's security as the ultimate goal, political security as the fundamental condition, economic security as the basis, and military, scientific, technological, cultural and social security as the guarantee. As the damage caused by the COVID-19 epidemic since the beginning of January 2020 has demonstrated, it is urgent to strengthen public health safety, and especially, to incorporate biological safety into the national security system. China needs to prepare a systematic plan for the establishment of a national bio-security risk prevention and control system, and to control related internet rumors, so that the national security system will be stronger and the people's sense of security will be greatly enhanced.

The increasing demands now being raised in relation to the environment are due, on the one hand, to the insufficient attention paid to environmental construction over a certain period following the reform and opening-up. The shortcomings in this instance have resulted in many ecological problems that endanger the physical and mental health of the people. On the other hand, these demands are also being heard because environmental needs have acquired an intrinsic character. China's development has entered a critical period, in the sense of needing to provide more high-quality ecological products to meet the people's growing requirement for a beautiful natural environment. In relation to people's livelihoods, the protection of the natural world has become an important social demand; the masses of the people are eager to see the quality of the environment improved. To meet this demand, "the decision" points out the need for our society to construct its practice on the basis that clear waters and green mountains are invaluable assets; to adhere to a basic state policy of conserving resources and protecting the environment; to implement the principle of prioritizing conservation, protection and natural recovery; and to firmly follow the path of civilized development, ensuring development in production, prosperity in life and soundness in human interactions with the natural environment. Four systems must be put in place and enacted, namely, a rigorous system of environmental protection, an all-round system of highly efficient resource utilization, a sound system for the protection and restoration of nature, and a strict system assigning responsibility for the conservation of the natural environment.

4. Improving the National System of Basic Public Services and Bringing About a Better Life for the People in Conditions of Common Prosperity

"Ensuring people's access to childcare, education, employment, medical services, elderly care [*sic*], housing, and social welfare assistance" (Xi 2017) is an important task set by the

19th CPC National Congress, as well as an important component of a better life for the population. Since the 19th CPC National Congress, President Xi Jinping has repeatedly stressed the importance of this task (Xin 2020). On October 25, 2017, in his speech at the first plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping stated:

> On the journey of the new era, all comrades in the party must focus in the most direct and realistic way on the issues that concern the people's interests. They must always take the people's concerns as their own concerns, and starting from the people's concerns, must bring more benefit to people's livelihoods and solve more of their burdensome problems. Comrades must make continuous progress in ensuring universal access to childcare, education, employment, medical services, elder care, housing, and social welfare assistance; constantly promote social fairness and justice; and keep promoting the all-round development and common prosperity of all the people. (Xi 2018a)

On April 23, 2018, during the fifth collective study session of the Politburo, Xi Jinping again stressed that China should focus on meeting the people's growing needs for a better life, constantly improve the quality and savor of people's lives, promote social equity and justice, "make new progress in ensuring universal access to childcare, education, employment, medical services, elder care, housing, and social welfare assistance," and "keep advancing towards the common prosperity of all the people" (Xi 2018b). During his visit to Wuhan on April 26, 2018, Xi Jinping stressed the goal of universal access to childcare, education, employment, medical services, care of elderly people, housing, and social welfare assistance. To that end, "the decision" emphatically pointed out that China must perfect its national system of basic public services in areas such as universal access to childcare, education, employment, medical services, elder care, housing, and social welfare assistance; do everything in its power to meet people's needs; and pay special attention to ensuring institutional construction that has wide coverage and that provides basic functions and bottom-line guarantees in relation to people's livelihoods. So far, such construction has been steadily advanced.

The need to provide universal access to childcare was stressed in the report of the 19th National Congress of CPC as an important part of the party's work to ensure and improve people's livelihoods. The future of a country can be seen in how it treats its children. Institution building has continued to improve since the 19th CPC National Congress. In November 2018, the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council issued "Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Standardizing the Development of Preschool Education," in an effort to provide institutional solutions to the problems of parents who find securing kindergarten places for their children difficult or unaffordable. As well as the issue of kindergarten admission, the question of care from birth to kindergarten has been on the agenda. In May 2019, the General Office of the State Council issued "Directions on the Development of Care Services for Infants and Children under the Age of Three,"[3] seeking to ensure that child care becomes accessible and that children of all ages can receive effective care services.

Where universal access to education is concerned, important progress has been made in integrating the development of compulsory education in urban and rural areas through institutional construction, and this has helped to realize equity, integration and high quality in the educational field. China faces some of the world's most complex education problems, which include a lack of balance between urban and rural areas in

education provisions, further imbalances in education between cities, provinces, and autonomous regions, and also imbalances within cities. Through institutional construction, the problems of education will be addressed, with the thrust of policy always toward training fresh generations of campaigners for socialism with Chinese characteristics. Equity in education will be pursued, to allow each child fair access to high-quality education. The quality of education will be raised for all types of learning, through improving the coordinated development mechanism for vocational and technical education, higher education, continuing education, etc. The aim will be to achieve top world rankings for China's education system in many areas. Great changes are taking place every day in China, and this is placing great demands on the country's vocational education, higher education and continuing education. Efforts should be made to meet these demands through institution building.

With regard to employment, institutional construction is more systematic. If we define the basic socialist economic system as resting on distribution according to labor as the main body with the coexistence of various modes of distribution, "the decision" emphasizes the strategic, long-term nature of this system, as well as the urgency and feasibility of its implementation. In line with the spirit of "the decision," the system of distribution according to labor includes the following aspects. There should be no earnings without work, except in the case of people who are unable to participate in labor activity for physical and health reasons. All who have the ability to work must contribute their labor, thus preventing the emergence of parasites in society. Society should adhere to the principle of more pay for more work, with special attention directed to protecting incomes derived from labor. We need to increase the remuneration of workers, especially of those on production lines, and to increase the incomes of those who make particular contributions in special posts. In the case of the latter, an example is provided by the notice issued on February 22, 2020, by the Central Leading Group to Deal with the Epidemic.[4] This notice called for a doubling of the temporary work allowance and a tripling of the salary level for front-line medical staff in Hubei Province (including medical teams from other provinces who came to Hubei to assist). We need to raise the proportion of labor-based income in the initial distribution, so that the labor income of the entire society will gradually rise; improve the coordination mechanism of labor relations; build harmonious labor relations; and achieve decent work and all-round development for the multitudes of workers, with their incomes increasing along with the growth of their enterprises.

With regard to access to medical treatment, "the decision" clearly specifies the need to strengthen the institutional guarantee that the people's health conditions will be improved; to focus on the whole cycle of human life and the whole process of health care; and to improve national health policies so that the broad masses of the people enjoy equitable access to systematic, reliably available health services. As early as 2016, the "Outline of the Plan for a Healthy China 2030"[5] issued by the State Council made it clear that by 2020, a basic health system with Chinese characteristics would be established to cover both urban and rural residents, and that by 2030, the system for promoting public health would be further improved, with the main health indicators reaching the level of high-income countries. By 2050 a healthy country, with its health provisions corresponding to those of a modern socialist country, will be established. To achieve these goals, of course, China needs to increase the intensity of its system building. The

COVID-19 epidemic has highlighted the shortcomings and deficiencies that continue to stand in the way of creating a healthy China, especially in the construction of the public health system. Urgent problems remain in such areas as the early warning mechanism, the disposal mechanism, the emergency mechanism, the material reserve for epidemic prevention, and other fields of infrastructure construction.

Where care for elderly people is concerned, "the decision" clearly points out that China is to respond positively to the ageing of its population through institution building, accelerating the development of a care system for elderly people that coordinates home-based care with community care institutions, and that combines medical care with fitness care. China already has nearly 250 million elderly people, so it must step up efforts to build a care system for the elderly. Not only is this population of 250 million extremely large, as there are few countries in the world with more than 200 million people, but China's retired population increases significantly every year. Through institutional construction in this area, the elderly will come to receive high-quality care services, enjoying sustainable care, support, entertainment and ease of mind. Only when the elderly have a happy old age can the young have hope for the future.

To solve the housing problem in China, "the decision" stipulates accelerating the establishment of a housing system with multiple suppliers, multi-channel guarantees, and a combined rental and purchase system. Housing is an important issue for people's well-being, and one that bears not only on economic development but also on social development. Housing involves a wide range of issues. Housing construction is among the driving forces of economic development, and a moderately active housing market provides momentum for several industrial chains. Housing is also a basic human right, essential to the ability of citizens to live in peace and contentment, and a key question for determining whether happiness can be achieved. If young people spend more than half of their income each month on rent or mortgage payments, their sense of happiness will decline. China should further improve its housing-related system, not only to meet the requirement that housing should be for living, not for speculation, but also to "provide shelters for all in need" as imagined by ancient Chinese intellectuals.

In the area of social welfare assistance, "the decision" points out that China must pay attention to the role of the third distribution, to the development of charity and to other social welfare undertakings. Welfare assistance is not only a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation, but also a common issue facing the world. It is also an inherent requirement of a socialist system. Here, China needs to address a number of institutional issues through creating a coordinated and improved system that covers social assistance, social welfare, charity, and priority care and placement. The goals must be to improve the social assistance system, achieving coverage of the widest possible layers of the population and providing help for all in need; to improve the social welfare system, including raising the level of welfare, improving the quality of welfare services, and training relevant professionals; and to develop charity undertakings. Charity is a topic now receiving close attention, but its importance was not sufficiently recognized in the past. The corresponding system was not well established, and this is now causing difficulties in its development. It is therefore necessary to study the core problems of the development of charity in the new era, to improve the related system, and to achieve development at a higher level. Also requiring improvement is the system of priority care and placement, so that relevant personnel can get the treatment they deserve. The establishing and steady

development of these institutions needs the support of fiscal, financial and taxation policies, which will require attention from the perspective of social infrastructure construction.

5. Meeting People's New Expectations for a Better Life through Comprehensive and Systematic Institutional Construction and Governance

As we enter the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, people have an all-round need for a better life. On various occasions President Xi Jinping has addressed this topic, summarizing the challenges and using a range of vivid analogies. On November 15, 2012, he told a meeting between the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the 18th CPC Central Committee and Chinese and foreign journalists:

> Our people love their life. They hope to have better education, more stable jobs, higher incomes, more reliable social security, more advanced health services, more comfortable living conditions, and a more beautiful environment. They hope their children will grow up better, work better and live better. (Party Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee 2014, 70)

On July 26, 2017, in a speech at a special seminar of provincial and ministry leaders on "Studying the Spirit of Xi Jinping's Important Speeches and Preparing for the 19th National Congress of the CPC," he said:

> After nearly 40 years of reform and opening-up, China's social productive forces have improved markedly, people's lives have improved significantly, their aspirations for a better life have become stronger, and diverse, multi-layered and multi-faceted characteristics of the needs of the people have appeared. People hope to enjoy better education, more stable jobs, higher incomes, more reliable social security, more advanced health services, more comfortable living conditions, a more beautiful environment, and a more abundant spiritual and cultural life. (Xi 2017)

These higher needs are concrete manifestations of people's aspiration for a better life, manifestations that are both material and spiritual, that are related both to production and everyday life, and that are apparent in both contemporary and cross-generational terms.

Proceeding from multiple directions, "the decision" stresses the need to meet these requirements through institutional construction. (1) Better education requires not only continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and teachers, but also a relatively balanced distribution of educational resources. "The decision" clearly stipulates the need for comprehensive implementation of the CPC's educational line, for adherence to the priority of educational development, and for a focus on developing education that is satisfactory to the people. This means high-quality education that is able to be enjoyed by all, from elementary school to college, with a fair distribution of opportunities. It also means that children will be able to grow up in a good state of physical and mental health, able not only to acquire knowledge, but also to learn how to get along with others and be kind to them. (2) Providing more stable jobs includes guaranteeing fuller employment and employment with better prospects and opportunities for development. To that end, "the decision" explicitly calls for the development of

promotion mechanisms that direct people into fuller and better-quality employment. Such mechanisms include: vigorously creating platforms to promote employment through entrepreneurship, so as to enable more people to realize their value through entrepreneurship; exploring new technologies and channels that can bring wealth to society and provide people with wider employment opportunities; and constantly formulating talent development mechanisms that can help promote employment. (3) The projection of higher incomes suggests that people's incomes will continue to increase along with economic and social development, and to a certain extent in line with people's expectations. Attaining this goal also involves continuously reducing the gap between rich and poor. In order to achieve more satisfactory incomes for the population, "the decision" clearly states that the party and government must encourage people to get rich through hard work. Legitimate income must be protected, the income of low-income groups must be increased, and the middle-income groups in society must be expanded. The party and government need to regulate excessive income, to bring hidden income into the open and regulate it, and to ban illegal income. The implications are far-reaching: the mainstream goals of society, which are to receive broad policy support, are to include aiding citizens to achieve prosperity through hard work and by legal means. Meanwhile low-income groups, including both the relatively poor and those at the bottom of the social ladder, are to be helped to continuously increase their incomes through a range of appropriate mechanisms and through research on related institutions. (4) More reliable social security includes wider coverage and better-quality services. In order to achieve this, "the decision" clearly calls for improvements to the social security system, to encompass the entire population; adherence to the principle of ensuring coverage for all in need; and improvements to the basic old-age insurance system and the basic medical insurance system, with coordinated and sustainable urban and rural coverage. The aim is to steadily improve the level of social security. (5) More advanced health services require improving the quality of hospital care, improving doctors' diagnosis and treatment skills, and achieving a relatively balanced distribution of medical resources. To that end, "the decision" clearly calls for deepening the reforms to the medical and health system, for improving the basic health care system, and for upgrading the medical insurance and relief system for major diseases. The health-related systems should be more scientific and comprehensive to fit in with actual social development. For example, in the early days of the COVID-19 epidemic some patients avoided seeking hospital care out of fear they would not be able to afford the treatment. As a result, they not only lost the opportunity for medical treatment, but also caused new infections. Later, the central government decided to waive charges for all patients receiving COVID-19 related testing and treatment, a decision that played a positive role in preventing and controlling the epidemic. Studies need to be conducted of similar problems, and new institutional arrangements formulated. (6) More comfortable living conditions include increases in housing area per person, reduction of the burden of housing costs on ordinary people, optimization of the living environment, and so on. In order to achieve more comfortable living conditions, "the decision" clearly defines the overall direction of the housing system reform. (7) The objectives for a more beautiful environment include: obvious improvements in all aspects of the natural environment, with better air, soil, water, forests, rivers, lakes, seas and grasslands. To achieve a more beautiful environment, "the decision" clearly stipulates strict regulation. This is to include a system of ecological

and environmental protection aimed at preventing environmental damage at its source, along with process control and accountability provisions that include liability to pay compensation for damage; a supervisory and regulatory system for stationary pollution sources based on emission permits; an improved legal system in the area of ecological and environmental protection; and a judicial system better able to enforce the related laws. (8) A richer spiritual and cultural life includes a wider variety of cultural products and more convenient public cultural services. To enrich people's spiritual and cultural lives, "the decision" puts forward a clear, multi-faceted system design: improving the public system of cultural services in urban and rural areas; optimizing the allocation of urban and rural cultural resources; encouraging diverse social forces to take part in constructing the public cultural service system; deepening the reform of the cultural system; and accelerating the improvement of the cultural management system and the production and operation mechanisms. These systems and mechanisms need to conform to the laws governing the development of advanced socialist culture, to embody the requirements of socialist market economy, and to be conducive to stimulating cultural creation and innovation. This is a two-pronged approach that incorporates both cultural elements and industrial considerations, and which is conducive to better-quality cultural works. (9) The whole of Chinese society expects better conditions in which its children can grow up, live and work, and accordingly, these aims are central to the government's continuous efforts, carried out under the direction of the party.

The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics has the ultimate goal of achieving a better life for the people. Every step in the development and improvement of this system is aimed at further serving the interests of the people and at realizing their aspirations for a better life.

Notes

1. See GMW.cn: https://m.gmw.cn/2019-08/01/content_33046802.htm.
2. See "Third Live Interview on Reading the 'Report on the Work of the Supreme People's Court.'" https://topics.gmw.cn/2021-03/09/content_34672113.htm.
3. See http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2019-05/09/content_5389983.htm.
4. See http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-02/23/content_5482402.htm.
5. See http://health.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1216/c408914-28955776-2.html.

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